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ABSTRACT

Basic education for girls and women has been part of UNESCO's and UNICEF's concerns since the early days of the two organizations. Both organizations not only consider access to basic education a fundamental human right, but also see girls' and women's education as vital in enhancing their roles as contributors to and beneficiaries of development. Most UNESCO and UNICEF programs in the field tend to be geared to one or more of the following issues: (1) improving girls' access to primary schooling; (2) relevance of curricula, availability of female teachers, and teacher attitudes in the classroom; (3) literacy training for women; (4) institution building in support of women; and (5) producing gender-sensitive data. Examples of projects in these areas are found in all parts of the developing world. In addition, the two organizations promote cooperation among countries and provide analysis, research, and advocacy connected with the educational problems faced by women and girls. The two organizations have seven priorities for future action; these priorities concern continuing to promote the education of women and girls while rooting out prejudicial materials and attitudes and working to change government policies to provide adequately for women's education. (This report includes an appendix that describes 52 projects supported by UNESCO or UNICEF that provide or promote the education of women and girls in developing nations.) (KC)

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UNESCO-UNICEF JOINT COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

ED 366 848

UNESCO and UNICEF Activities in the Field of Basic Education for Women and Girls

Paper prepared by
UNESCO and UNICEF Secretariats

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
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THIRD MEETING, UNESCO, 6 - 7 MAY 1992, ROOM X bis

I. INTRODUCTION

Basic education for girls and women has been part of UNESCO's and UNICEF's concerns since the early days of the two Organizations. The World Conference on Education for All, and The World Summit for Children have particularly emphasized the need for greater attention and practical action in the field to correct existing gender gaps in basic education.

Both Organizations not only consider access to basic education as a fundamental human right, but also sees girls' and women's education as vital in enhancing their roles as contributors and beneficiaries of development. Through basic education women and girls can acquire the material means, the confidence and the competencies to act more effectively in the fields of food production, environmental preservation, family planning, child upbringing and education, health and hygiene; education will also give them greater control over economic matters, and encourage more active participation in community life and decision making. Basic education and literacy projects should be conceived so as to meet these overall goals.

The strategy adopted by UNESCO is set out, notably, in the Third Medium Term Plan. On the one hand, UNESCO promotes and carries out educational activities aimed at tackling the specific problems of women and girls, and on the other, a very thorough effort has been made to integrate a "female dimension" in all projects and programmes undertaken by UNESCO.

UNICEF's focus on child survival and development has highlighted the vital link between mothers' education and children's survival and health. Training, instructional materials, and media messages related to health, nutrition and sanitation have been incorporated into most UNICEF-assisted basic education programmes. In area-based integrated basic services, where women form the majority of beneficiaries, literacy training is one of the important programme components. Increasingly, UNICEF has come to realize that the sustainability of the impressive gains made in areas such as health, nutrition, water and sanitation and women's development requires that female education receive the highest priority. Literacy learning has also become an important ingredient of many income-generating activities for women.

II. ACTION AT COUNTRY LEVEL

Main areas of action

Both Organizations agree that, while continued analysis of gender disparities and advocacy in favour of women and girls are important, the essence of their efforts must be operational action at country level. The most effective entry points for such action depend, of course, on specific national conditions. However, most UNICEF and

UNESCO programmes in the field tend to be geared to one or more of the following issues:

i) Improving girls' access to primary schooling:

This issue which is closely bound up with the socio-cultural context calls for a variety of interventions, ranging from teaching of girls in separate classes or schools, to providing girls' schools close to the homes; safe transportation to and from school; information and advocacy to change parents attitudes towards education of girls; easing the daily workloads of the girls as well as their mothers; ensuring child care facilities for younger siblings etc.

ii) Relevance of curricula, availability of female teachers, and teacher attitudes in the classroom:

These issues are closely related to the problems of girls' enrollment and retention rates in primary schools. Although progress has been achieved in removing sex stereotypes from school books during recent years much remains to be done; in countries with a low percentage of female school teachers special efforts to recruit female teachers and make it possible for them to work in remote rural or mountaineous areas are a key aspect of many UNICEF or UNESCO projects; non-formal primary education programmes successfully employ and train village women as teachers; teachers' attitudes, behaviours,and teacher-pupil interaction in and outside the class room greatly affect learning achievement, retention and drop-out of girls. Influenced by the surrounding society's attitude towards female education, school teachers often spend more time on improving the perfomance of boys while leaving the girls students in a corner without much attention or encouragement. Awareness raising and reshaping of teachers attitudes are thus an important task of UNESCO and UNICEF field projects.

iii) Literacy training for women is a major component of many UNESCO and UNICEF field programmes. Many of these programmes have met with problems and many lessons have been learned the hard way. It is all the more important that UNESCO and UNICEF cooperate to shape new literacy approaches that will be both viable and feasible. Three programme elements have proven to be essential: first, the acquisition of reading, writing and numeracy skills through the use of mother tongue and functionally linked to the learners lives and fields of interest; second, training in practical, immediately useful skills which will improve the women's productive capacities, add to their income, and help them and their families in the daily struggle for survival; thirdly, an education which empowers women, renders them conscious of their lot in society, and gives them confidence to exercise their civic rights.

iv) Institution building in support of women:

In quite a few countries, government institutions, university departments and NGOs have started research and advocacy on issues related to girls' and women's development and education. Scarce resources, sometimes combined with lack of political commitment, have limited the results and impact of the work undertaken. National and/or regional capacity building with regard to female education is, thus, an important issue which UNICEF and UNESCO field projects have endeavoured to address with varying success.

v) Producing gender-sensitive data:

Precise data are often lacking to determine gaps in girls' school enrollment and retention as well as women's literacy levels, with due attention being paid to urban-rural disparities, ethnic and social groups etc. In addition to quantifiable data, qualitative information highlighting the economic and socio-cultural complexities influencing girls' and women's education is needed. Helping countries to establish or strenghten a data and research base for these purposes is another challenge for UNESCO and UNICEF programmes in the field.

Examples of UNESCO action in the field

UNESCO's role as a catalyst, in education as elsewhere, may explain the special emphasis on pilot projects related to girls and women's education. These projects permit trying out innovative methods on a limited scale and with small financial resources. Their results are evaluated and subsequently disseminated in writing, through videos, workshops and conferences etc. Examples of pilot projects currently underway or being launched include the following:

- China: Literacy project for Gansu minority women.
- Ethiopia: Literacy for Somalian refugee women (in co-operation with UNHCR)
- Philippines: Literacy for female plantation workers (in co-operation with ILO)
- Vietnam: Literacy for rural women from the High Plateau.

But Unesco also engages in large-scale field projects involving basic education and literacy work for women and girls. A list of those currently in operation, funded from extra budgetary resources, appears in the Annex. Two examples may be worth presenting here:

In the Gobi desert in Mongolia nomadic women live under particularly difficult physical and socio-economic conditions. They are often left alone with full responsibilities for on average 5-6 children, a huge livestock and with very little education or skills training. Nomadic women are thus vulnerable, especially now when Mongolia is going through a transformation process from a centralized and planned economy to an open market economy. On the invitation of the Mongolian government UNESCO prepared in 1991 a major non-formal education and skills training project for nomadic women in the Gobi desert, which will be started in May 1992.

The acquisition of basic "survival skills", primarily in such areas as agriculture, health, hygiene, nutrition, child protection, family planning, and co-operative management is the first step to be taken to improve women's lives in rural Niger. A project for training of rural instructors to coordinate and animate basic education activities intended for women was started last year.

Examples of UNICEF action in the field

Currently there are some twelwe countries in Africa, seven in Asia, and five in the Middle East and Noth Africa where UNICEF assisted projects in primary, formal and non-formal education explicitly address the gender issue. Details concerning these projects appear in the Annex. Furthermore, most adult literacy projects supported by UNICEF focus on illiterate women. In Africa, UNICEF supports adult literacy programmes in 18 countries including Botswana, Chad, Ethiopia, Ghana, Namibia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Swaziland, Zaire and Zimbabwe. In Asia several countries have adult literacy programmes where the major beneficiaries are women, such as Bangladesh, China, India, Indonesia and Pakistan. In the Middle East and North Africa region UNICEF assisted literacy programmes in Algeria, Oman, Sudan, Turkey and Yemen provide learning opportunities mostly for women.

Two examples of UNICEF field action in support of women's and girls' education may be highlighted here:

The TOSTAN project in Senegal, supported by UNICEF since 1988, has chosen an integrated approach to teaching literacy that weaves together functional information and skills, deeper understanding of the environment and

increasing mastery of the tools of literacy and numeracy. Participants are encouraged and enabled to name the principal constraints on their lives and to develop strategies for overcoming them. The literacy teachers or project "facilitors" as they are called, are chosen among newly literate persons who are without the attitude of superiority found with many formally trained school teachers. In practice, but without explicit project design, women participate far more frequently than do men. This is surprising since the facilitators, on the other hand, are almost exclusively male. This combination of female learner and male teacher in a traditionally sex-segregated society may be possible because of the group dynamics approach of the project.

In Nepal, in the Seti-region, a pilot project for young low-cast girls (Cheli Betis) is aimed at improving the status of young girls and women in the villages; developing in them a sense of identity through teaching them to read, write and count; improving conditions of hygiene, health, and home; encouraging women's participation in various development activities and increasing female school attendance. The project is training women from the villages as cheli beti teachers, and special literacy material mirroring the daily life of the girls have been prepared. This project, originally initiated by UNESCO, is now being supported and further developed by UNICEF.

III. PROMOTING CO-OPERATION AMONG COUNTRIES

Regional and sub-regional activities which help countries pool their resources and exchange relevant experiences have their place in UNESCO's and UNICEF's programmes. Typically, this involves workshops to develop literacy and post-literacy materials several of which have been organized in Asia, Latin America and Africa. As well, regional activities have aimed at training of national resource persons, joint analysis of problems, and comparative national studies. Thus, for the Andean sub-region, a book on indigenous mothers and education describing the role women play in safeguarding cultural heritage and ensuring the schooling of the girls was prepared last year.

UNESCO and UNICEF have, in co-operation with NGOs and within the framework of the Major Programme for Latin America, prepared prototype literacy materials for women, convening for this purpose a subregional seminar in Bolivia.

The two Organizations are also in the process of jointly preparing and organizing a Pan-African Conference on the Schooling of Girls. The aim of the conference will be to review the present alarming situation concerning girls' schooling in the African countries and to discuss strategies and concrete policy measures for reducing the gender gap in primary education.

Thirteen case studies on socio-cultural obstacles to the schooling of girls have been carried out in: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroun, Guinea, Malawi, Mauritania, Mozambique, Niger, Central African Republic, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Tchad and Togo. Co-operation with UNICEF country offices has taken place in most cases. These country studies will constitute the main reference documents for the above-mentioned Pan-African Conference.

IV. ADVOCACY AND ANALYSIS

Analysis, research and advocay are a second line of attack on the educational problems faced by women and girls. The better part of advocacy is to provide sound information and data on the realities of women's lives, and to draw these to the attention of decion makers at all levels.

At the international level a number of advocacy activities to support education of girls and women have taken place.

Two meetings on women's and girls' education were organized at the UNESCO Institute for Education in Hamburg for the purpose of reinforcing inter-agency co-operation. They developed a number of joint project proposals for basic education of women. The last meeting gathering six UN-agencies also adopted recommendations to the agencies concerning their future work.

Both agencies are actively participating in the preparation of the forthcoming OECD/DAC conference on Donors' Roles and Responsibilities in Education. A major item on the conference agenda will be basic education of women and girls for which UNICEF is preparing a comprehensive paper on "Strategies to Promote Girls' Education: Policies and Programmes That Work". Likewise, UNICEF has taken a lead role on women's and girls' education in the collaborative efforts of the 'Donors to African Education' which are coordinated by UNESCO's International Institute for Educational Planning.

An international seminar on Education for Girls and Women in Islamic Cultures was held in Frunze, Kirghistan, in 1990 with participants from Arab States and Asian countries with large muslim populations. A report "Islam, Perestroika and the Education of Women", summarizing the main presentations and discussions of the meeting, has since been published.

UNICEF NGO Committee on Education has actively been engaged in advocacy for girls' education. In April last year the Committee organized a consultation in New York on NGOs and the Advancement of the Education of the Girld Child; the recommendations of the consultation were presented to International Consultation Forum on EFA in December. The NGO Committee has organized this past April an international conference on Education for All Girls: A Human Right, A Social Gain.

In collaboration with the NGO working group at the United Nations in Geneva, UNESCO has prepared a down-to-earth women's literacy guide for practioners, which will be ready for publication in early summer 1992. The book gives concrete and practical advice on how to plan and carry out women's literacy activities. The intention of preparing such a guide is to spur activities and to provide grass roots organizations with the tools to carry them out in the field.

Literacy for Rural women in the Third World' is the title of a recent UNESCO publication which has been brought out in French, English and Spanish. A Chinese version is being prepared.

On the basis of materials received from a number of UN-agencies concerning their way of integrating women's needs in their projects and programmes, UNESCO is also editing a publication "Alphabétiser les femmes: Un nouveau Defi".

Girls and women living in particularly difficult circumstances require special advocacy efforts on the part of international agencies. Three case studies on prostitution of children, especially girls, are being carried out at present in Colombia, Thailand and Benin. They will be amongst the evidence examined by a major advocacy meeting to be convened in the near future.

V. PRIORITIES FOR FUTURE ACTION

Given the size and urgency of the educational problems of women and girls, UNESCO/UNICEF cooperation in this vital area will need to be expanded in the coming years. Both organizations are conscious of the emphasis which the Joint Committee on Education, at its second meeting, has placed on this domain.

The guiding principles of UNESCO/UNICEF cooperation to meet the basic learning needs of women and girls might be summed up in seven points; the two Organizations should:

i) Commit themselves to take up women's and girls' education as a priority area in all their educational activities to achieve Jomtien goals;

ii) Continue the harmonization of policies of both Organizations on girls' education and female literacy;

iii) Systematically examine the curricula and textbooks at primary level to make sure that all gender bias and negative references to girls and women are removed;

iv) Work towards the establishment or strengthening of affordable and accessible primary teacher training programmes for female teachers where both preservice and inservice training can be provided;

v) Help in strengthening of national or regional institutions that support study, publication and advocacy for girls' and women's education;

vi) Appeal to the donor community, private foundations and NGOs to provide financial support and technical assistance for girls' and women's education;

vii) Appeal to governments to provide adequate budgetary and administrative support to promote girls' and women's education.

This being said, practical action at country level should continue to be given the highest priority. The difficulties and success of UNESCO and UNICEF field projects on basic education for women and girls, will need to be jointly analysed and evaluated. In the main areas of concern, which this paper has highlighted, technical and substantive cooperation between the two organizations should be strengthened. A case should also be made for closer cooperation around a number of significant pilot projects, such as the ones outlined above.

Finally, UNESCO/UNICEF cooperation needs to keep in sight the International Women's Conference scheduled to take place in Beijing, China, in 1995. Preparations, at UN level, for this important follow-up event to the 1985 Nairobi Conference have started. UNESCO and UNICEF have a special responsibility to ensure that basic education for women and girls will be high on the agenda of the 1995 Beijing Conference.

ANNEX

OVERVIEW OF UNESCO AND UNICEF FIELD PROJECTS/PROGRAMMES ON BASIC EDUCATION OF WOMEN AND GIRLS

A. OPERATIONAL PROJECTS - UNESCO

REGION/ COUNTRY	PROGRAMME OBJECTIVE
AFRICA	
1. Togo	Education of women and young girls by training of literacy animators and production of literacy material
2. Sierra Leone	Literacy and civic education for women by creating literacy and adult education centers
3. Niger	Training of female instructors to assist rural women in improving their daily lives by providing basic education
4. Mali	Literacy and environment education for rural women
5. Gambia	Functional literacy and post-literacy for rural women by creating literacy centers, rural libraries and producing literacy material (rural newspapers)
6. Senegal	Literacy project for parents of children in bush schools. The project includes a special strategy to ensure that minimum 40 per cent of the target group will be women
ASIA	
1. Laos	Post-literacy and productive training for young women from ethnic minorities/hill tribe women

2. Mongolia	Non formal education and skills training for nomadic women in the Gobi desert
3. Regional project	Pilot project for promotion of literacy through primary education for girls and disadvantaged children
4. Regional project	Production of video software on women's literacy learning materials development
5. Regional project	Expansion of skills-based literacy programmes for women and girls

B. UNICEF-ASSISTED PROGRAMMES/PROJECTS IN PRIMARY, FORMAL AND NON-FORMAL EDUCATION AND ADULT LITERACY, FOCUSSED ON BASIC LEARNING NEEDS OF WOMEN AND GIRLS

REGION/ COUNTRY	PROJECT TITLE	PROGRAMME OBJECTIVE
ASIA		
1. Bangladesh	Universal Primary Education	To promote primary and basic education, especially for girls
	Non-formal Education and literacy	To increase literacy rates, especially among girls and women
2. Nepal	Basic Education for Out-of-school girls	To provide basic education to girls of 8-14 years unreached by formal system
	Adult Literacy for Women	To reduce adult illiteracy rate to at least heal of 1990 level with particular attention on reducing female illiteracy

3. India	Education for All	One of the objectives is to launch advocacy and promotional campaign to focus on issues such as girls' education
	Literacy, Adult and Continuing Education	To incorporate issues relating to mother and child care in the National Adult Education Programme in order to increase demand for literacy among women and girls
	Teacher education	One of the important components of the training programmes is to incorporate elements of social, community and parent mobilization and reaching the unreached, especially girls
	Non-formal Education	To make intensive inputs to promote female literacy through district level interventions
	Bihar Education Project	To generate a momentum in an educationally backward state through educational reconstruction, focussing on girls, women and other disadvantaged population
4. Pakistan	Formal Primary Education System	Three of the six objectives are to increase enrolment of girls, to strengthen planning capabilities of female managers, and to advocate for promotion of girls' education
	Non-formal Primary Education	To increase girls' enrolment particularly in rural and low-income urban areas through such innovative projects as mosque schools, home schools and learning centres in 20 districts

	Female Adult Literacy	To increase female participation in literacy by upgrading existing facilities and improving services
5. Bhutan	Primary Education	One of the objectives is to increase girls' enrolment by establishing multi-grade community schools and improving relevance of education for girls
	Non-formal Education for Girls and Women	To retrieve drop-out girls and empower them with knowledge and skills
6. China	Primary Teacher Training	To train women cadres in order to help reduce female dropout rates
	Female Education, Literacy and Skill Training for Women	To provide training in literacy and facts for life to illiterate women, parents and girls
7. Indonesia	Non-formal Education	To improve effectiveness and quality of combined literacy learning and income generation activities
	Education for Child Survival & Development (CSD) through Islamic Education Institutes	To reach families and female drop-outs with health and nutrition education through village mosques

AFRICA

Formal Education

1. Chad	Primary School	To improve the quality of primary education by reducing the dropout rate, especially for girls

2. Ethiopia	Education General	Better quality data on teaching-learning conditions to improve participation of girls and women
3. Ghana	Life Skills in Formal Education	To enhance the quality of primary education through inclusion of facts for life
4. Guinea	Capacity Building	To improve the quality of primary school and to increase the rate of enrolment, particularly of girls
5. Nigeria	Primary	To encourage school attendance by providing health care in schools and by improving teaching materials
6. Rwanda	Education	Universal access to basic education, reduction of adult illiteracy rate and improved quality and relevance of education
7. Sierra Leone	Basic Education (School Upgrading)	To develop low cost models of primary and basic education to reduce illiteracy and to encourage acquisition of essential life skills
	Basic Education (Early School Leavers)	Objectives as above
8. Swaziland	Curriculum Development	To adopt curriculum to include skills for survival and development of adolescent girls and boys
9. Tanzania	Curriculum Development for CSD	To include essential elements of CSD in primary curriculum
10. Zambia	Learning opportunity and achievement	To improve access and learning achievement in primary schools

11. Zimbabwe	Curriculum Development and Teacher Education	To improve the quality of education by improving learning environment, teacher education and instructional materials

Adult Literacy and Non-formal Education

1. Botswana	National Literacy Programme	To develop functional approaches to adult education and to extend the programme to remote areas and especially to women and girls
2. Cape Verde	Literacy Training	To reduce overall illiteracy rate from 39% to 12% by 1995, and to increase literacy rate among women to 80%
	Literacy Programme	As above
3. Chad	Literacy and Adult Education	To reduce illiteracy rate of adults, especially of women
4. Cameroon	Women's Literacy	To increase participation of women in development
5. Comoros	Literacy	To place particular emphasis on providing functional literacy for women
6. Ethiopia	Vocational Education	To provide basic development education for women in rural areas
7. Ghana	Non-formal Education	To equip 50% of rural women in ten districts with basic knowledge and skills in literacy, health, income-generation, fertility management
8. Guinea	Adult Literacy	To reduce illiteracy rate especially among women and girls over 15

9. Mozambique	Adult Education	To introduce pilot projects for women in mother languages
10. Mali	Literacy and post-literacy	To increase literacy rates among women and girls to 30% in areas receiving family food production assistance from UNICEF
11. Madagascar	Literacy	To strengthen functional literacy activities to ensure women's participation in social advancement activities
12. Malawi	Functional Literacy	To improve literacy rates, especially of women
13. Mauritius	Area-based Project for Rodrigues	To increase female literacy rate and vocational training for early school leavers, particularly girls
14. Niger	Literacy	To reduce the gap between the literacy rates of women and men
15. Nigeria	Education for Women	To increase female literacy rates in 46 LGS from 31% to 41% by 1995;
16. Sierra Leone	Adult Education	To establish the foundations for eliminating adult illiteracy, especially among females by 1995
17. Togo	Functional Literacy	To train 20,000 women and to design and translate material into local language
18. Senegal	Non-formal Education	To provide rural community, especially women, the possibility of participating in literacy training and basic education in national languages

MIDDLE EAST/NORTH AFRICA

1. Algeria	Basic Education	To promote girls' enrolment in rural and dispersed areas and to introduce health education concepts in schools
	Female Literacy	To reduce geographic and gender disparities in literacy rates
2. Sudan	Basic Education	One objective is to reduce female illiteracy rate by 50%
3. Tunisia	Primary Education	To lower school dropout rates, particularly among rural girls
4. Turkey	Universalization of Primary Education	Focussing on eastern and south-easiern regions, to stress the importance of equal access for girls at all levels of education
	Adult Education and Literacy	To meet basic learning needs of adults, mainly women in eastern and south-eastern regions
5. Yemen	Formal Education	To encourage parents to send girls to schools by establishing small multigrade rural schools with female teachers
	Non-formal Education: Literacy Drive via TV	One objective is to encourage women to participate in literacy groups